

## New Castle Court House Museum

The New Castle Court House Museum is located in the historic district of New Castle and administered by Delaware State Museums. It is one of the oldest surviving courthouses in the United States and a registered National Historic Landmark Site. The original 1732 court was built over the remains of Delaware's first courthouse of 1689, with additions and modifications throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. All jurisdictions of Delaware's courts have met in the building including the Federal courts. The courts removed to the City of Wilmington in 1881 with the changing of the county seat.

The New Castle Court House was also Delaware's first state house and meeting place of Delaware's colonial and the first State Assembly. In the Assembly Room, the legislature passed a resolution on June 15, 1776 to separate from Great Britain and Pennsylvania, creating the Delaware State. Two months later on September 20, 1776, the first Constitution for the Delaware State was adopted. In 1777, the capital moved to Dover.

The Court House cupola was designated in 1732 as the center of a 12-mile radial circular boundary, which created Delaware's unique curved northern border.

Significant events took place at the New Castle Court House involving slavery and the Underground Railroad. Delaware's most prominent abolitionist and stationmaster on Delaware's Underground Railroad, Thomas Garrett, assisted in aiding a runaway slave family to escape from New Castle to Pennsylvania. He and fellow abolitionist, John Hunn, stood trial before the Federal Court seated at New Castle on charges violating the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. The trial was presided by United States Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney. Garrett and Hunn were found guilty and fined thousands of dollars, losing homes, businesses, and personal property. But, in the court room, Garrett would defiantly proclaim that he would continue with his efforts in helping those oppressed by slavery regardless of the cost.

Visitors to the New Castle Court House Museum learn about Delaware's colonial history, early system of law and government and how its legislative and judicial decisions affected the lives of its citizens. Featured at the museum are exhibits on Delaware's colonial court and assembly, Delaware's Underground Railroad and Abolitionists, and *The Right To Trial By Jury*, which highlights important Delaware jury trials and verdicts and their impact on Delaware law and African American civil rights.

